

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 31

March 12, 1998, 3:51 pm
Page S-1867 Temp. Record

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES BY CHINA/Passage

SUBJECT: A resolution urging the United States to seek passage of a United Nations resolution criticizing the People's Republic of China for its human rights abuses in China and Tibet . . . S. Res. 187.

ACTION: RESOLUTION AGREED TO, 95-5

SYNOPSIS: As reported and passed, S. Res. 187, a resolution on human rights abuses by the People's Republic of China, will express the sense of the Senate that "the United States should introduce and make all efforts necessary to pass a resolution criticizing the People's Republic of China for its human rights abuses in China and Tibet at the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights." The resolution is based on three findings: that the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights provides an international forum for discussing and expressing support for greater human rights performance (this year's meeting will be on March 16); that the People's Republic of China engages in widespread human rights violations; and that President Clinton has pledged to increase efforts to get the United Nations to pass a resolution dealing with the serious human rights abuses in the People's Republic of China.

Those favoring passage contended:

The United Nations Human Rights Commission will meet in a few days. When it does, the United States should introduce and support a resolution criticizing communist China for its horrendous human rights abuses. According to the State Department human rights report on China for last year, "the Government of China continued to commit widespread and well-documented human rights abuses in violation of internationally accepted norms, including extrajudicial killings, the use of torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, forced abortion and sterilization, the sale of organs from executed prisoners, and tight control over the exercise of the rights of freedom of speech, press, and religion." No one doubts the validity of any part of this report.

Before being elected, President Clinton championed linking China's most-favored-nation trade status with its performance on

(See other side)

YEAS (95)				NAYS (5)		NOT VOTING (0)	
Republican (51 or 93%)		Democrats (44 or 98%)		Republicans (4 or 7%)	Democrats (1 or 2%)	Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Abraham	Hutchinson	Akaka	Johnson	Chafee	Glenn		
Allard	Hutchison	Baucus	Kennedy	Grams			
Ashcroft	Inhofe	Biden	Kerrey	Stevens			
Bennett	Jeffords	Bingaman	Kerry	Thurmond			
Bond	Kempthorne	Boxer	Kohl				
Brownback	Kyl	Breaux	Landrieu				
Burns	Lott	Bryan	Lautenberg				
Campbell	Lugar	Bumpers	Leahy				
Coats	Mack	Byrd	Levin				
Cochran	McCain	Cleland	Lieberman				
Collins	McConnell	Conrad	Mikulski				
Coverdell	Murkowski	Daschle	Moseley-Braun				
Craig	Nickles	Dodd	Moynihan				
D'Amato	Roberts	Dorgan	Murray				
DeWine	Roth	Durbin	Reed				
Domenici	Santorum	Feingold	Reid				
Enzi	Sessions	Feinstein	Robb				
Faircloth	Shelby	Ford	Rockefeller				
Frist	Smith, Bob	Graham	Sarbanes				
Gorton	Smith, Gordon	Harkin	Torricelli				
Gramm	Snowe	Hollings	Wellstone				
Grassley	Specter	Inouye	Wyden				
Gregg	Thomas						
Hagel	Thompson						
Hatch	Warner						
Helms							

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

human rights. After being elected, he did an about-face and said that he would delink the issues. He, and Members who supported that new policy, promised that the United States would continue to pressure China to improve its human rights record. Since that action 4 years ago, trade with China, or rather purchases from China, have escalated rapidly. Our annual trade deficit with China has grown exponentially. For 1997 it reached the astronomical level of \$49.7 billion. Products from China, many of which are produced very cheaply for China's military by its slave-labor political prisoners, have been a huge success in the United States. Tens of thousands of American jobs have been lost, but importers have made a lot of money.

The claim that supporters of unrestricted trade with China always make is that if China gets wealthier political freedoms and human rights will inevitably follow. They say that once an industrial and merchant class exists, it will demand reforms. We have always been skeptical of this claim--we think it is based more on wishful thinking than on a rational analysis. We think that Senators believe it because it conveniently fits in with their desire to support businesses that are making money by trading with China. Throughout the history of the world, authoritarian rule has been the norm, whether of wealthy or poor nations, and despotic rulers have thrived regardless of the existence or absence of a business class.

As China has grown in strength, it has not hesitated to use its economic muscle to bully other nations into looking the other way when it commits its abuses. For the past several years, China's leaders have aggressively lobbied against efforts at the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to pass resolutions condemning its human rights abuses. Last year it actually threatened Denmark for daring to sponsor such a resolution. This year, it has aggressively lobbied European countries to oppose such resolutions in favor of working on "private" bilateral efforts. Our colleagues insisted that trade would eventually be the tool that would force reforms in China, but instead it is being used as a tool by China to bully civilized countries.

Some of our colleagues tell us that we should not pick on China--they say that there are plenty of rotten countries in the world, and if we criticize China it should be just as part of a list of those countries. They also say that criticizing China alone will result in that country punishing us by buying more from our economic competitors than from us. Neither argument carries any weight with us. There are very few countries that are as reprehensible as China. Further, the same Senators who are making this argument have never objected before when the Senate has passed resolutions addressing egregious behavior by particular countries. The Senate will soon consider a resolution in favor of prosecuting Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi officials for crimes against humanity--will our colleagues vote for that resolution, or will they say we must also urge the prosecution of other officials around the world, including in China, who are likewise guilty of such crimes? As for the argument that China will retaliate economically, we note that the current trade relationship is nothing to brag about, and that even if it were it is not a moral argument to say we cannot publicly criticize inhuman behavior because we may lose money.

In the past, regardless of trade policies, the United States has not hesitated to speak out against tyrants in China and elsewhere. It has frequently sponsored and worked to pass resolutions condemning China's human rights abuses. Those efforts have had positive effects. We know from testimony by many former political prisoners in China that they could tell whenever the United States put pressure on China to behave humanely because conditions would always improve. Whenever the United States failed to speak out against abuses, conditions again worsened. China's President Jiang recently defended China's human rights record by saying that "both democracy and human rights are relative concepts." He is wrong and we should say so. We urge passage of this resolution.

Those opposing passage contended:

No Senator supports human rights abuses in China or anywhere else. The question is not whether one wants to promote reforms, but how best to promote reforms. The resolution before us singles out China for criticism. We cannot support this tactic because we are certain that it will backfire. China is unquestionably guilty of human rights abuses, but the situation is better now than it has been at any other time under communist rule. We remind our colleagues that this is the country that conducted two of the worst despotic reigns of terror in all history, the "Great Leap Forward" and the "Cultural Revolution," and the victims of those campaigns were its own citizens. After decades of rule by communists who did not have the slightest regard for personal or political freedoms, or even for human life, the situation has begun to improve. Free trade with China has begun to create personal freedoms. People are allowed to find their own jobs, choose their own careers, and rent their own apartments. Political freedoms are growing as well. Chinese citizens now have access to uncensored news on the radio, satellite television, and the internet. Local elections are becoming democratic, and the people now even dare to file lawsuits against the government--last year nearly 100,000 were filed. If this resolution called on the United States to oppose human rights abuses in China and in other countries that are guilty of similar abuses we would support it because it would be fair. Singling out China, though, is not fair, and China will react negatively. China has historically been very sensitive to criticism, and it has proven willing in the past to wipe out reforms with new reigns of terror. In this case, we think that it will retaliate against any country that it believes is treating it inequitably. In all of its thousands of years of history, China has never been free. The closest it has come has been in the past few years, and that progress has come about because of the world's trade policies, not because of criticisms. This resolution is counterproductive and should be rejected.